

Remarks for S.B No. 342

An Act concerning the development of an internet website for the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route – National Historic Trail.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Cassano:

Mr. Vice Chairman, Senator Coleman:

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen of the Planning and Development Committee:

Representative Madam Sawyer:

Captain Tarantino, Second Regiment Light Dragoons:

Mr. DePold

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning FOR the proposed bill having to do with the creation of a website intended to highlight the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route and ancillary flanking trails and sites. This project would create a self-service informational "roadmap" with links to town-specific historical sites; links to a calendar of events, programs, historical celebrations, and re-enactments, as well as links to related amenities, such as restaurants, shops, lodging, and entertainment in our state.

Such an architected website, conceived as a framework, has the powerful potential to showcase Connecticut's rich revolutionary heritage by using the content already developed in this excellent brochure "Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in Connecticut, Connecticut's First National Historic Trail" and by linking to already existing websites belonging towns, historical societies and museums, and amenities for travelers along the route. Such a website could substantially increase tourist interest, by the mere fact ALL this information would be in one authoritative virtual "portal" as opposed to 50 or 60 places, as is the case today.

Why do this at all?

First of all, Connecticut has interesting and lively early 17th and 18th century history, even prior to the revolution. Most states don't have this amazing early history, and many Americans trace their ancestry to Connecticut families. Such people are potential visitors, especially during the summer and fall foliage season. French people and Canadians have historical curiosity about events that inspired both the American and the French revolutions, and would like to know and see what Rochambeau experienced in Connecticut. French officer experiences during the revolution were published as edited diaries in the 1800s. These were translated into many languages and were popular throughout Europe for decades. The French people still hold this state in special regard, in part due to the good relations here during the revolution, as well as

the lasting goodwill fostered among Washington, Rochambeau, and Lafayette. I mention this to explain *why* there is an historical tie and precedent that makes Connecticut a special draw for historical tourism. So a well-planned website, using the trail as a thematic portal could be perceived as a new and interesting tourist offering for New England.

Second, Connecticut is a beautiful state with intimate landscapes, varied terrain, attractive small towns with well-kept greens, meeting houses, churches, stone walls, and patriot and French burying grounds as you well know. The bucolic landscapes and natural abundance described by the French in their officer journals still provide a pleasing visual impact today. Connecticut is reforested to the way it was back in 1770s. A case in point is White's Tavern, built in 1773, on Hutchinson Road in Andover. Though now a private home, the building and the section of road leading up to it are unchanged since French officers there stayed in 1781. The virtual tourist on the website is likely to be pleasantly surprised by the reality; the unspoiled corners of the 18th century that still exist in Connecticut today.

Third, Connecticut's role during the revolution is factually undeniable, but not well known outside Connecticut. Historic tourism pertaining to the revolutionary era is imaginatively captured by Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. It is accurate to say that Connecticut was the heartbeat of the revolution, the logistical and supply headquarters, and the site of major strategic planning. Connecticut militias and Sons of Liberty actively participated in the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Battle of Harlem Heights, the Battle of Long Island, and in defense of the Wyoming Valley frontier, now Pennsylvania. So participation by local sons in battles outside Connecticut is well documented. The point is here is that even though Connecticut sons fought elsewhere, each town along W3R has a legacy and memory of local patriots, of French regiments, of old inns, and houses, and burying grounds from this revolutionary period and earlier. Often there is a palpable story of sacrifice, ingenuity, and liberty. This local history articulates with Rochambeau's march through Connecticut.

Finally, Connecticut has more than any dedicated indoor museum could ever offer. With the help of this carefully crafted website portal, it can offer a virtual roadmap for a moving on-site revolutionary experience, all 127 miles of it. You might consider this *living history*. This is a portal to the real deal.

So given these facts and reasons, Ladies and Gentlemen, I urge you to support this bill.

Thank you.

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